

## the soda and the ocean breeze by vanillanemo

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** April Harringrove Challenge, M/M

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2021-04-15

**Updated:** 2021-04-15

**Packaged:** 2022-04-01 01:56:42

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,307

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Stupid brands and their stupid 'equality' campaigns.

April Harringrove Challenge Day 12 - Soda

## the soda and the ocean breeze

### Author's Note:

I got all inspired to actually do one of these!  
(Then I had the busiest three days of the year and  
couldn't upload on time so it's late as hell)

*Stupid brands and their stupid 'equality' campaigns.*

This was the third time in a month that Steve had been hired to represent a brand as part of a Pride campaign, and he was getting tired of it.

Like sure, he was openly gay, but that wasn't everything he had to offer! He could be so much more than just a recognisable queer face in an advertisement.

But – being an actor didn't really pay all that well, and as much as he'd had that one great role, the one that had given him some recognition in the industry, most of the paycheck from that went to helping Dustin pay for his mom's cancer treatment.

Claudia Henderson had opened her home to him within a couple of weeks of him babysitting Dustin, when she realised just how much Steve was left at home alone, so he wanted to help in any way he could.

So, as much as Steve was sick of being the token gay representative, he couldn't really afford to turn down the jobs. Hence why he was at Santa Monica pier, getting make up blotted over all his beauty marks, in preparation for shooting a Coca Cola ad. The director - whose name Steve has forgotten, is it Casey? Claude? - is blathering on about angles and poses and lighting, and Steve is half listening, half wondering why they've all got to make it so complicated.

He's going to sit with a group of people dressed up for a beach day, let his pretend boyfriend put an arm around his shoulders, pretend to laugh and pretend to drink Coke for an hour, then collect a pay check and go home. Easy peasy.

“Ah, Hargrove! Make up finally released you?” The director says, turning to look at someone in the entrance to the main crew tent. Steve tries to look over, see the newcomer, but the makeup artist grabs his face, tutting in annoyance, and he resigns himself to holding still.

The new arrival, this ‘Hargrove’ guy, says something in reply to the director, too quiet for Steve to make out the words, his voice a deep timbre.

“Very nice, very nice. Well, let me introduce you to Steve, come on, come.” The director waves Hargrove in, just as Steve’s makeup artist declares him done and *finally*, finally leaves him alone.

Now, let’s be very clear here – Steve has never believed in love at first sight. Thought it was all sappy mumbo jumbo made up by people trapped in unhappy marriages to justify to themselves why they’d ever gotten together in the first place.

But right now, looking at the freaking Adonis standing in front of him? He might just reconsider.

Billy Hargrove is 5’10”, with sun kissed skin and perfect blonde beach waves, and eyes the colour of the ocean. He’s also got abs Steve could eat off, and the most kissable lips Steve has ever seen in his life.

(Steve’s worked with Manny Jacinto, so that’s saying something.)

He’s polite, charming, has the voice of an angel and an undeniable presence that makes Steve feel all fuzzy and warm.

He’s also almost certainly straight. Steve saw the casting call for this advertisement, and they weren’t bothering to look for queer talent, despite being in Los motherfucking Angeles.

Steve firmly tells himself that he will not be developing a crush on Billy Hargrove like some lovesick little teenager.

His brain ever so helpfully reminds him that they have to pretend to be dating for the afternoon, and Steve tells it to fuck off.

They get called outside, to the spot of the beach that's been claimed for the shoot. There's a huge picnic blanket set up, covered in beach stuff like flip flops, rolled out towels, and a big rainbow beach ball. There's two coolers full of glistening Coca-Cola bottles, carefully positioned so that the logo is visible on all labels. They're covered with a thin layer of condensation that Steve expects will catch the light in pretty ways.

The whole cast gets arranged on the picnic blanket, Steve sitting with his back to the pier, leaning into Hargrove's shirtless chest. The cameras will be catching shots with the pier and the ocean in the background, and there's the added bonus of the light not being in the eyes of most of the cast.

Just before they roll, someone comes around and arranges rainbow confetti in artful piles all over the space.

Then the director (who isn't named Carey, or Clark, or Collingwood) calls action, and they all switch on.

They laugh with each other, tell jokes, blinding smiles in the late afternoon sun. They sip Coke that's been open for half an hour before the shoot even started and pretend that it's the best tasting thing in the world.

Steve relaxes against Hargrove, presses their legs together, looks over at him in pretend adoration.

(It's definitely pretend, alright?)

Occasionally, the director will adjust the setting. Make the cast move around, adjust the props. He has some of the girls toss the beach ball back and forth for a while.

As the sun starts to touch the horizon, the peaceful cheer of the set is interrupted by a shrill ringing.

"Who the hell left their phone on?" The director asks, and his assistant winces.

"Sir, it's your phone," he says, holding it out. "Your wife is calling." The director sighs.

(Carter. Collins. Crawford. Steve's going to get it eventually!)

"Keep the cameras rolling. You lot have got a good chemistry going on, just keep up with it. We want as much footage as we can get before dark of you guys hanging out. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He steps off the set, taking the annoying ringing away, and Steve huffs a small sigh.

"Gotta love people who don't adhere to set etiquette, right?" He quips, and the others laugh, playing it up for the cameras. You'd think he said the funniest joke in the world, with they way some of them are acting. Hargrove chuckles next to him, and Steve can feel the vibration in his chest.

Feel his heart skip a beat.

"I mean," one of the girls says, bright smile plastered in place, "The rules never apply to the director, do they?"

Steve laughs and says, "I'll drink to that."

He raises his bottle to her, and she returns the gesture. He can see the crew moving cameras around out of the corner of his eye, all of them eager to catch the moment.

He sips his drink, and makes sure his facial expressions don't show any sign of how warm and flat it is.

A silence falls over the group, even though they've all still got their happy smiles firmly fixed in place. Steve wracks his brain for things to do, ways to improvise their having fun act until the director gets back. His eyes flicker across the group, over the set, the stacks of Coca-Cola and generic beach paraphernalia and piles of confetti that are literally *everywhere*-

An idea occurs to him.

Steve chuckles, and all eyes turn to him. "Seems like a shame to waste all this confetti, right?" He puts his bottle down, and curls his spare hand into the pile of multicoloured bits of paper.

"As opposed to what?" Hargrove asks.

“We’re supposed to be having the most fun ever, right?” Steve says innocently.

And then throws a handful of confetti over Hargrove’s head. It flutters down all over Hargrove, a tiny rainbow of tissue clinging to his curls, his skin, there’s even a little pink bit stubbornly clinging to the tip of his nose.

Hargrove huffs out a breath, and smiles sweetly. Too sweetly, Steve realises, promptly before he gets a face full of confetti himself.

The cast is laughing at him, so Steve takes it upon himself to enact revenge. He scatters a pile of confetti at the group, lets it sprinkle down onto their rainbow bathing suits and perfectly tousled hair.

All out war breaks out, the whole lot of them flinging confetti at each other, on their feet as they run around like children, trying to dodge and hide behind each other. They’re laughing, smiling, real ones this time, having genuine fun and ignoring the camera operators following them around.

Hargrove looks gorgeous when he laughs, Steve realises.

*How much better would it feel if he was laughing like that for me?*

But Steve’s got a bigger problem than his burgeoning crush, the one he’s desperately trying to suppress. He’s run out of ammunition, and he looks around wildly for more.

There – on the picnic rug. Where Hargrove was sitting. There’s a small pile of confetti, the stuff that fell off when he stood up.

Steve makes a mad dash for that handful of confetti, but just as he reaches it, Hargrove grabs him around the middle, swings him around, laughing.

Then he slips, falls to the ground, and Steve lands on top of him, still held in his arms. They make eye contact, and Hargrove’s smile gets softer, sweeter.

Steve’s traitor brain starts to wander, starts to dream about what might transpire if this was real, if he was having a picnic at the beach

with a group of friends and his boyfriend, if he was really dating Hargrove.

They'd probably kiss right about now. Steve would lean down, and Billy would stretch up to meet him. Their lips would meet, sweet and salty from the soda and the ocean breeze.

The soda would taste so much better on Billy's lips, he's sure of it.

Steve shuts that train of thought down by dropping his handful of confetti onto Hargrove's face. He sputters, laughs, and lets go of Steve, who rolls off him.

The director comes back at that moment, pissed off about whatever happened with his wife and taking it out on them, furious about them messing up the set by throwing confetti around.

(Caldwell? Cox? Campbell?)

They reset as best they can on the picnic rug, reclaim their Coke bottles, and go back to their fake happy group hangout, all trying their best to hide the undercurrent of tension that has settled into the whole shoot.

Once the sun has gone down and the sky's gone dark, the director calls a wrap. Steve only has a second to say goodbye to the rest of the cast before he gets funnelled back to the tent for an outfit change. The brand wants pictures of him on the pier at night, so Steve's got hours more of work before he's done.

And multiple outfit changes, he realises, looking at the different looks laid out in the dressing room for him.

It's gonna be a long night.

\*\*\*

By the time Steve's finished with everything, back in his regular

clothes and been released from the job, its nearly eleven. He's fumbling with his bag, switching it between his hands as he tries to put his jacket on and walk at the same time.

He's so focused on his task that he's not paying attention to where he's stepping. He trips, arms flailing wildly as he tries to regain his bearings.

A strong pair of arms grab him around the middle and pull him back upright. Steve gets his feet under him, and steps back to take a proper look at his saviour.

It's Hargrove, dressed in black ripped skinny jeans and a blue button down that matches his eyes. He's still wearing the leather bracelet with the rainbow beads though, which seems like an odd choice.

Maybe he's stealing it from the set? Lord knows Steve's done that a couple of times.

"Hey," Steve says, adjusting the sleeves of his jacket.

"Hey yourself," he replies, leaning against the pier railings. "You know, its usually a good idea to watch where you're putting your feet, pretty boy."

What the hell is Steve supposed to say in response to that?

And 'pretty boy'? What's with that?

*He could be gay, and into you,* his brain helpfully supplies, but Steve ignores it.

"Really? I never knew," he says, sarcastically. "In all seriousness though, thanks for the save."

"No worries."

Silence falls between them, and Steve immediately starts fumbling for something to say.

(Really, he should make his excuses and leave, but he also kind of wants to stay in Hargrove's presence for as long as he can.)



“It was a good shoot today,” he settles on. “I had fun.”

“Me too,” Hargrove admits. “Though I wasn’t expecting to.”

“Oh?” Steve asks, cocking his head a little.

Hargrove shrugs. “I’ve worked with Corry before, he’s an uptight dick.”

“Corry!” Steve snaps his fingers. “I’ve been trying to remember the guys name all day.”

Hargrove snorts and says, “He’s not worth the effort, let me tell you.”

It’s Steve’s turn to shrug. “A paycheck’s a paycheck though, am I right?”

“Yeah,” Hargrove says. “You mind if I use that paycheck to buy you a drink?”

Steve can’t help it. His brain just... short circuits.

“Huh?” He says, very intelligently.

Hargrove chuckles. “You, me, and a couple of drinks. What do you say, pretty boy?”

“I, uh,” Steve stammers, trying to wrap his brain around the fact that this *insanely hot dude* is *actually asking him out*.

His brain helpfully conjures the image of what Robin would say if she learned he’s blown this, and Steve internally cringes. He’ll never hear the end of it.

“Drinks. Yeah, I’d like that.”

\*\*\*

In June, when the finished advertisement comes out, Steve watches it

from his couch, wrapped up in Billy's arms. They watch themselves fling confetti at each other, watch themselves run around like children.

They watch themselves nearly kiss.

And then they do.

(Turns out Steve was right – soda tastes so much better when he's kissing it off Billy's lips.)